

TALE FEATHERS

St. Louis Audubon Society, P.O. Box 220227, St. Louis, MO 63122-0227
www.stlouisaudubon.org director@stlouisaudubon.org (314) 599-7390

Calendar

BEGINNER BIRD WALK FIELD TRIPS

FOREST PARK VISITOR CENTER

FIRST SATURDAY OF EVERY MONTH AT 815 AM

Special walk just for the new and/or casual watchers.

Reservations not required, but for further info contact Chris at birding@forestparkforever.org.

BIRDING FIELD TRIP—PAGE 3

RIVERLANDS MIGRATORY BIRD SANCTUARY

SATURDAY JANUARY 9TH AT 9A

HALF DAY TRIP LOOKING FOR WINTERING BIRDS.

EAGLE DAYS AT CHAIN OF ROCKS BRIDGE—PAGE 7

MDC-SPONSORED PUBLIC OPEN HOUSE AT THE CHAIN OF ROCKS

BRIDGE JUST SOUTH OF I-270 AT THE MISSISSIPPI RIVER

SAT/SUN JANUARY 16TH AND 17TH FROM 9A TO 3P

JANUARY MONTHLY PROGRAM—PAGE 5

BIRDS-EYE VIEW OF THE NATURE CONSERVANCY IN MISSOURI

TUESDAY JANUARY 19TH AT 7P

GRAND GLAIZE BRANCH OF STL COUNTY LIBRARY AT 1010

MERAMEC STATION ROAD.

BIRDING FIELD TRIP—PAGE 3

RIVERLANDS MBS AND COLUMBIA BOTTOM CA

SATURDAY FEBRUARY 6TH AT 8A

ALL DAY TRIP LOOKING FOR WINTERING BIRDS.

BACKYARD BIRD FESTIVAL

MISSOURI BOTANICAL GARDEN

SATURDAY FEBRUARY 6TH FROM 7:30 AM TO 3 PM

WORKSHOPS, BIRD WALKS, EXHIBITS. FEES VARY. TO REGISTER, CALL 314/577-5140 OR VISIT WWW.MOBOT.ORG.

BIRDING FIELD TRIP—PAGE 3

BALDWIN LAKE AND PEABODY COAL PLANT IN ILLINOIS

SATURDAY FEBRUARY 13TH AT 9A

ALL DAY TRIP WITH CARPOOL OPTION.

GREAT BACKYARD BIRD COUNT—PAGE 6

CITIZEN SCIENCE MID-WINTER BIRD CENSUS

FRIDAY FEBRUARY 12TH THRU MONDAY FEBRUARY 15TH

CREVE COEUR LAKE MEMORIAL PARK WITH ST. LOUIS AUDUBON OR ANYWHERE YOU WANT TO BIRD

FEBRUARY MONTHLY PROGRAM—PAGE 5

INTERIOR LEAST TERN AT RIVERLANDS

TUESDAY FEBRUARY 16TH AT 7P

CREVE COEUR COMMUNITY CENTER AT 300 N. NEW BALLAS

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Missouri's Savanna Community

By Bruce Schuette

Imagine a tallgrass prairie with hundreds of species of wildflowers and eight foot tall grasses waving in the breeze. Now add a scattering of oak trees, some in small groves and others widely separated. Because of growing in relatively open conditions the trees don't grow very tall, but have a large widely spreading crown that can soak in sunlight from all around. This describes a natural community called a 'savanna', and this is what much of St. Louis, St. Louis County and St. Charles County used to look like. At the time of Euro-American settlement of the St. Louis region, savanna was one of the dominant natural communities (habitats).

The natural communities that existed here before the current cities and human communities were a continuum from open prairies, to savanna, woodland and forest. We know from early land survey records and eyewitness accounts, that at least 60% of the city of St. Louis, and hundreds of thousands of acres in the St. Louis region were open prairie. We know from the same sources that much of the remaining landcover was savanna and open woodland. These communities consisted of many of the same sun-loving grasses and wildflowers that make up a prairie, but with the addition of scattered or relatively open stands of trees. Just like in the prairies, it was frequent fires for thousands of years that kept the trees from getting too thick and shading out the abundant

See Savanna on Page 4

Board Meetings

Open to All. 1st Tuesday of Every Month at 7 pm. Powder Valley Nature Center at 11715 Cragwold.

Board recruitment is an ongoing process and requires your interest and our need. If you have thought of serving in such a way, stop by or call one of us.

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Newsletter

TaleFeathers is published monthly. For submissions, comments or corrections, contact Mitch Leachman as noted above.



www.earthsharemo.org for more info.

Conservation Issue Update

By Karen Meyer

I had an opportunity to visit the Columbia Bottom Conservation Area one recent evening. A full moon rose across a lovely, quiet, impressive expanse of fields, wetlands and trees, unobstructed by human structures. I can only too well imagine what an intrusion the proposed Riverview Casino would be for birds and other wildlife, with lights, buildings, parking lots, and noise. The *Common Sense Coalition's* *CasINO* effort is moving forward with strategies for continued opposition. You can help in a number of ways—write letters to the editor or your elected officials, spread the word to your family and friends, visit Columbia Bottom Conservation Area to see for yourself, and join a committee of the coalition. This is NOT the place for a casino, or any other major development. Just a few hours of your time could make a big difference. Contact me at conservation@stlouisaudubon.org.

Environmental education for children is sorely lacking in our schools. The No Child Left Inside Coalition, which St. Louis Audubon is a member, is actively working to address this. The current opportunity is to convince the Secretary of Education to include provisions for pre-K through 12 environmental and outdoor education in the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. Please tell Secretary Duncan at ESEA/comments@ed.gov by mid-January that you support the inclusion of NCLI in the reauthorized ESEA. (See page 6 of this issue for a sample letter.) For more info about the Coalition, visit www.nclicoalition.org.

Mark your calendars to attend the annual Missouri Conservation Lobby Day Wednesday, February 3, 2010. Join a carpool for this one-day trip to Jefferson City, and register to participate in visits with your legislators regarding important environmental issues. If you care about what is being debated in our state government but you have not participated in anything like this before, do not let that stop you. You will be briefed on the approach, and it is an interesting experience just being involved with the process in our state capitol. Help us speak out that Conservation Matters. Visit www.moenviron.org/Lobbyday.aspx for more details.

The UN Climate Summit in Copenhagen failed to achieve the dramatic international treaty necessary to stop global warming. Yet, major tenets of such a treaty were agreed upon. There is much work to be done, most especially in our own Congress with passage of a climate change bill. It will likely be a priority in the spring; your voice will need to be heard.

Thank you for all that you do to make a difference and wishing you the best in the New Year! ◆

President's Message—HAPPY NEW YEAR!

By Dave Rogles

This season is a traditional chance to look forward and set a course for the next year. In our organization, this means looking to opportunities within the local community—opportunities for cooperative programs, for outreach, for new initiatives. Like everyone in the time of Claus, our Society has its own Wish List.

We continue to give classroom programs and our Education Team is working hard to develop new programs, more interactive programs, and bring the message of sustainability and conservation to tomorrow's leaders. We wish for a couple of volunteers to help deliver the programs. If you are interested in volunteering, contact Lisa Nansteel, our VP of Education.

We have reached the end of the natural cycle of many board members; much of the Board has served in multiple capacities and for multiple terms. This year we need to recruit several new board members and we believe the best candidates are already members. Our Board is a working board, and we are looking for a few people with an interest in helping and the time to devote to the cause.

In the near term, the never-ending fight to save our floodplains from development will be heating up. Our VP of Conservation, Karen Meyer, has been doing yeoman's work, keeping us informed about the challenges and working with other organizations to rally opposition support. This is an area of critical need—the forces of development are strong, well financed, and politically connected. We need volunteers who want to organize our efforts and rally our troops. Contact Karen Meyer if you are able to help.

In the next year, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers will be opening a visitor center at Riverlands Migratory Bird Sanctuary. National Audubon is already involved in this process and we, as the local chapter of National, may be asked to help staff the center on a volunteer basis. This is an exciting opportunity for us. It will connect us with the public on a daily basis and allow us to spread the word about our great local resource, the Confluence of the Mississippi and Missouri Rivers. If you can help us out, contact me at (636) 541-1069.

I hope everyone had a safe and enjoyable holiday season! I look forward to seeing new faces in the coming year. Please come to our meetings and events and introduce yourself—I remember people best if they have a feather in their head! Our next event is Eagle Days at Chain of Rocks Bridge. See you there! ◆

Field Trips, Etc.

Jan 9th to Riverlands Migratory Bird Sanctuary: Mike Thelen will lead this half day trip starting at 9 a.m. Take Hwy 367 north from I-270. Turn right on last road before the Alton Bridge. Turn right on the next road to the Teal Pond lot.

February 6th at Riverlands Migratory Bird Sanctuary and Columbia Bottom CA: Bill Rowe will lead this full-day trip. Meet at 8 a.m. (note early time) at Riverlands. From I-270, take Hwy 367 north. Turn right on last road before the Alton Bridge—at the Fiska Gas Station. Turn right on the first road after

the station to the Teal Pond lot where we will meet.

February 13th at Baldwin Lake in Illinois: Torrey Berger will lead this all day trip to Illinois in search of waterfowl. To carpool, meet at 9 am at the commuter lot at I-270 and Hwy 30. To drive, take I-255 to Hwy 3 in Illinois. Follow to Redbud then take Hwy 154 to Baldwin. Follow signs to Lake Baldwin. Meet in the parking lot inside the gate.

All field trips are FREE. Reservations not required, unless noted—consult our website for details. Contact Pat Lueders with general questions at (314) 359-9364.

Missouri's Savanna Community

Continued from Page 1

groundcover and wildflowers. Because of their prolific sprouting abilities and thick fire resistant bark, oaks were the dominant trees of our savannas and woodlands. Several shrubs, like American Hazel, New Jersey Tea and Prairie Willow, also thrive in savannas by resprouting after fires.

A great variety of wildlife would have been part of this savanna community. An abundance of butterflies and bees would have been pollinating the abundant wildflowers while bison and elk were grazing nearby. While many birds use a savanna, several species are more characteristic. Among them are the Red-tailed Hawk, Northern Bobwhite, Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Northern Flicker, Eastern Wood-Pewee, Eastern Kingbird, Brown Thrasher, Blue-winged Warbler, Yellow-breasted Chat, Summer Tanager, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Indigo Bunting, Field Sparrow and Baltimore Oriole which all thrive in the open, almost 'orchard-like' conditions of a savanna. However, probably no birds characterize savanna more than Eastern Bluebirds and Red-headed Woodpeckers (an Audubon Watchlist species).



Red-headed Woodpecker
Mike Grant Photo

By using the original GLO (government land office) survey notes ecologists believe savanna covered an estimated six and a half million acres in Missouri. Now, however, savannas are considered among Missouri's rarest natural communities. Some savanna types are thought to be extirpated in the state, and all are considered to be critically endangered. But what happened to eliminate these 'prairies with trees' from our landscape? Like many of our natural habitats most areas were simply plowed, paved, built on, or taken over by invasive species. But a lot of our savanna acreage was lost because of the lack of fire. Without fire the savanna filled up with thickets of small trees, robbing the groundcover of abundant life-giving sunlight, and totally eliminating the natural grassland groundcover which defines our savannas.

Very few high quality examples of savanna still exist in Missouri (or just about anywhere in the Midwest), but fortunately a few places still have the potential to restore these rare natural habitats. At Cuivre River State Park several small remnant native grasslands provide the groundcover. By using prescribed burns and selective thinning to reestablish the open woody structure, savannas are beginning to reappear in the park. Some savanna can be seen right along the main park road, but a hike on the two mile long Blazing Star Trail provides the best way to get a taste of this very rare part of Missouri's natural heritage.

Savanna/woodland restoration efforts began at Cuivre River in the mid-80's and today encompass over 800 acres of extensive, high quality woodland, containing the best and most restorable savanna remnants. If you would like to know more about savannas, consider *The Terrestrial Natural Communities of Missouri* by Paul Nelson and published by the Missouri Natural Areas Committee. For details about Cuivre River State Park, including directions to the Blazing Star Trail, visit www.mostateparks.com/cuivre.htm. Finally, if you have specific questions about this project call (636) 528-7247 and ask for Bruce. ◆



Post Oak on Savanna *Bruce Schuette Photo*

A Bird's Eye View of the Nature Conservancy in Missouri

Tuesday, January 19, 2010 at 7:00 p.m.

Doug Ladd, Missouri Director of Conservation Science for the Nature Conservancy, will provide an overview of the Conservancy's priorities and actions across the state, including the benefit to several grassland and woodland bird species of concern. The presentation will take place at the Grand Glaize Branch of the St. Louis County Library at 1010 Meramec Station Road, just east of Hwy 141 and just north of Big Bend.

Doug Ladd has been involved with conservation planning and natural area assessment, management, restoration and research for more than 30 years, with particular emphasis on vegetation, ecological restoration and fire ecology. Doug is a research associate at the Missouri Botanical Garden in St. Louis and the Morton Arboretum in Chicago. He has written two plant field guides: *North Woods Wildflowers* and *Tallgrass Prairie Wildflowers*, and is a co-author of *Discover Natural Missouri* and *Distribution of Illinois Vascular Plants*.

Registration is not required and the program is free. Questions, contact Mitch at (314) 599-7390. ◆



Public Domain Photo by G. Lavendowski/USFWS

The Interior Least Tern at Riverlands

Tuesday, February 16, 2009 at 7:00 p.m.

Creve Coeur Community Center

Join us on February 16th as Sarah Miller, biologist with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, presents the first year results of the Interior Least Tern Floating Habitat Project, located at the Riverlands Migratory Bird Sanctuary in West Alton, Missouri. As you may recall from the August *TaleFeathers*, the project experienced dramatic success with over 20 nestlings from at least 12 nesting pairs of Terns. Sarah will provide background on the Least Tern and its population status, describe the project in detail including plans for the coming nesting season, and outline important ways birders can contribute.

Sarah Miller is a Biologist for the Environmental Stewardship Section of the Rivers Project Office, working on the Mississippi and Illinois Rivers. She has a Bachelor of Science degree in Biology and Environmental Science and a Masters degree in Environmental Science. She has been with the Environmental Stewardship Section for five years.

This is our annual joint meeting with the Webster Groves Nature Study Society. From I-270 and Ladue, go east on Ladue, left at the light at New Ballas, go ¼ mile north to the Creve Coeur Government Center at 300 N. New Ballas. Community Center is in the northwest corner of the lower level (closest to Olive and Ballas). Questions, call Mitch Leachman at (314)-599-7390. ◆



Interior Least Terns

USACE Photo

No Child Left Inside Letter of Support

By Lucas Johnson, NCLI

Following is a template that you can cut and paste and send to: ESEA/comments@ed.gov. Please consider personalizing the email to include your reasons for supporting NCLI as an educator, health advocate, outdoor enthusiast, business person or parent. Thank you for taking action!

Dear Secretary Duncan,

As you consider strategies to strengthen and amend ESEA, I urge you to consider the provisions laid out in the No Child Left Inside Act, which would expand opportunities for environmental and outdoor education in America's schools. Comprehensive environmental education has been shown to improve student achievement across core subject areas and increase engagement in learning. Environmental education is critical to providing our students with the knowledge and skills to tackle complex problems, and succeed in a green economy. What's more, getting kids outside and active promotes a healthy lifestyle that is essential to fighting obesity and reducing symptoms associated with attention deficit disorder, depression, and stress.

Leaving environmental education out of ESEA would be a missed opportunity to improve education while helping to systemically address the Obama administration's other priorities of energy independence, a strengthened economy, and a healthier nation. I support the inclusion of NCLI in the reauthorized ESEA.

Sincerely. ◆

Great Backyard Bird Count GREAT for Kids and Families

The 13th annual Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC) will take place from Friday, February 12, through Monday, February 15, 2010. Participants in the free event will join tens of thousands of volunteers of all levels of birding experience to count birds in their own backyards, local parks or wildlife refuges. St. Louis Audubon will host a Winter Birding Warm-up at Creve Coeur Park on February 13th or 14th to help introduce new folks to the GBBC.

Each checklist submitted by these "citizen scientists" helps researchers at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and the National Audubon Society learn more about how the birds are doing—and how to protect them. Last year, participants turned in more than 93,600 checklists online, creating the continent's largest instantaneous snapshot of bird populations ever recorded.

Anyone can take part in the Great Backyard Bird Count, from novice bird watchers to experts. Participants count birds for as little as 15 minutes (or as long as they wish) on one or more days of the event and report their sightings online at www.birdcount.org.

Bird populations are always shifting and changing. For example, 2009 GBBC data highlighted a huge southern invasion of Pine Siskins across much of the eastern United States. Participants counted 279,469 Pine Siskins on 18,528 checklists, as compared to the previous high of 38,977 birds on 4,069 checklists in 2005. Failure of seed crops farther north caused the siskins to move south to find their favorite food.

For more information about the GBBC, visit the website at www.birdcount.org. Or contact the Cornell Lab of Ornithology at (800) 843-2473 or gbbc@cornell.edu, or Audubon at citizenscience@audubon.org. Check out the February *TaleFeathers* or watch our website, www.stlouisaudubon.org for details on the Winter Birding Warm-Up.

Major elements of this article courtesy of GBBC News Release, dated September 25, 2009. ◆

Famed Hog Island Reopens

National Audubon Press



Photo by Stephen Kress

The National Audubon Society will reopen its legendary Hog Island for four adult ornithology sessions and one teen bird studies session during the summer of 2010. Dr. Steve Kress, Audubon's VP for Bird Conservation will direct the sessions. He will be joined by some of the country's top ornithologists who will serve as instructors, including – Kenn Kaufman, Pete Dunne, and Scott Weidensaul. Additionally, said Dr. Kress, there will be two totally new sessions offered in association with Elder Hostel (now Exploritas and accessed via <http://www.exploritas.org> and searching on "Maine") where participants will assist Project Puffin biologists to census gulls, eiders and cormorants at several nearby

seabird nesting islands. Participants in the September session will learn about land and seabirds through bird banding and presentations and assist with a habitat management project for endangered terns and storm-petrels at Eastern Egg Rock.

Known to thousands as the Audubon Camp in Maine, Hog Island was closed during the summer of 2009 to permit planning for the future. This process led to Project Puffin bringing back the popular ornithology programs for adults and teens. The adult programs are for both beginning and avid birders who would like to learn more about Maine birdlife and the biology of birds. The teen session is for 14–17 year olds with a keen interest in birds. This session is co-sponsored by the American Birding Association. Due to its varied habitats, Hog Island and vicinity are an ideal setting for the program, as more than 100 species frequent the area.

Participants live in authentic, turn of the century housing on the 330 acre spruce-covered island. Here, they will enjoy three home-cooked meals a day in an historic island farmhouse that overlooks Muscongus Bay. During the five-day sessions, small field groups will go on a variety of trips and boat cruises, and attend workshops and presentations on topics ranging from migration and the identification of warblers to the restoration of Atlantic Puffins and terns on nearby Eastern Egg Rock.

The Hog Island camp first opened in 1936, with Roger Tory Peterson as its first bird instructor. It is well known in America's environmental community as a distinguished and beautiful place of learning and enjoyment. For more information on dates, sessions, costs, instructors, etc. visit www.projectpuffin.org To read testimonials and see photos from previous Hog Island programs, visit www.naturecompass.org/fohi. ◆

Eagle Days at the Old Chain of Rocks Bridge

January 16/17 from 9a to 3p

Mark your calendar, bring your family or a friend, and join us for this entertaining and educational event highlighting the amazing Bald Eagle. St. Louis Audubon volunteers will be staffing a hands-on bird exhibit for kids of all ages in the warming tent at the center of the bridge (if interested in helping out, please call Dave at 636/541-1069). Viewing scopes will be available, and an eagle education program will be offered every twenty minutes. Take I-270 to the Riverview Drive exit, just west of the Mississippi River, and follow the signs. The event is FREE. For more details, contact 314/877-1309. ◆

St. Louis Audubon Society Donation Form

Mission: to create a community connection to nature through conservation and education.

Your support will allow us to maintain and expand our efforts in the St. Louis Metro Area. All our programs are free to the public. Thank you very much for your past support!

Education Only

Conservation Only

General Fund--Unrestricted

Name:

Address:

City, State, Zip:

E-Mail or Phone (if desired):

Make checks payable to:
St. Louis Audubon Society

Mail Checks to:
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P.O. Box 220227
St. Louis, MO 63122-0227

Contributions are Tax Deductible

We're on the Web!

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